
Anthrax Facts

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by bacteria called *Bacillus anthracis* that forms spores. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life in some situations. Contact with anthrax can cause humans and animals to become very sick. Anthrax is not contagious, which means you can't catch it like the cold or flu.

Anthrax can be found naturally in soil and domestic and wild animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, antelope, and deer can become infected when they breathe in or eat anthrax bacteria from contaminated soil, plants, or water. Rarely, people can get sick with anthrax if they come in contact with animals who are infected or contaminated with the bacteria.

Human Infections

People get infected with anthrax when the bacteria spores get into the body and become "activated." When they become active, the bacteria can multiply, spread out in the body, produce toxins (poisons), and cause you to become very sick. This can happen when people breathe in spores, eat food, or drink water that is contaminated with spores, or get spores in a cut or scrape in the skin. It is very uncommon for people in the United States to get infected with anthrax.

Symptoms

If anthrax comes in contact with your skin, it will cause a sore that will become a blister and then a skin ulcer. If it is breathed in, it can cause cold or flu-like symptoms such as a sore throat, mild fever, cough, chest tightness, and difficulty breathing. If anthrax is on something you eat or drink, it can cause nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, fever, and bad stomach pain.

Treatment

Taking antibiotics for 60 days in a row as soon as possible after coming in contact with anthrax is the only way to keep from getting sick from it.

Anthrax as a Weapon

Anthrax can also be used as a weapon. This happened in the United States in 2001 when anthrax was spread through the postal system by sending letters with powder containing anthrax. This caused 22 people to become infected with anthrax.

For more information, call the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center at 1-800-222-1222 or go to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/anthrax/.